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CONVERSATION BETWEEN TWO ELECTORS

ON THE

CHURCH AND STATE QUESTION.

James. So, William, I hear we're to have a general election very shortly?

William. Yes; and I am very glad of it, for I shall then be able to give my vote for religious liberty, and the removal of the State Church from our midst.

James. Why, I thought you had all you want of religious liberty already. You are a Nonconformist, and I am a Churchman, and under our equal laws you have as much liberty to worship God in the way you prefer as I have.

William. Yes; I know I have. But I don't like your Lord Bishops and your State-paid Clergy, and I want all religion put on a level. It is not fair that we should pay for your Clergy.

James. Stop, William, stop. Some one has been misleading you, or you have got hold of some of those bad tracts which tell you all kinds of untrue things about the Church.

William. I don't know what you call untrue things, but I know your Church was made by Act of Parliament in Henry VIII.'s time, and got all her property originally from the Roman Catholics, and I don't believe in a State-made Church, nor think it fair that your Church should keep tight hold of property given for the teaching of the Roman Catholic religion, and then go and teach quite differently.

James. Just as I thought, William. You have quite got hold of the wrong end of the stick. Our Church did not begin at the Reformation, nor did it get any Roman Catholic property at the Reformation. Our Church is over 1,500 years old, and had much of the property she now has before the time of William the Conqueror.

William. You don't think I am going to believe that?

James. Whether you believe it or not will not alter the facts of the case. Look into history and judge for yourself. The Church of England is the old Church of the land, founded here in early times before our Saxon forefathers came to England. And now, 1,500 years after, she is the same Church, with the same Apos-

tolie Ministry, the same teaching, the same Sacraments as she had then.

William. I never heard of this before.

James. Very likely not. Many men don't look into things for themselves, but take for granted that all is true which other people tell them, and so get led altogether astray.

William. Well, I should like to have a little more talk to you about the Church. Tell me about the tithes; did not the State give you them by Act of Parliament?

James. Why, William, you almost make me laugh. The State never gave the Church a penny of tithe. Tithe was paid to the Clergy as God's ministers hundreds of years before there ever was a Parliament in England. How, then, could Parliament have first given tithes to the Church?

William. How did she get hold of them, then?

James. I will tell you. When first the Gospel was preached in England and men became Christians they found the want of resident Clergy amongst them to teach themselves and their children. So the lord of the manor, or the great man of the place, went to the Bishop and asked for a Clergyman to live amongst them and teach the people. And the Bishop said he would send one if they would build a Church and a house for the Parson to live in, and give a tithe of the produce of the land to maintain him there for ever. They gladly agreed to this; and so a Parish was made, a Church built, and a tithe of the produce given every year to the Parson. And all by the free gift of the lord of the manor or the owner of the land in those days. And now you know, William, how Parishes began, and where tithe first came from, as well as I do.

William. When was this?

James. Well, you know, Parishes did not grow up all over England in a day. They began to be formed very early, and grew up bit by bit as Christianity spread from one part of the country to the other. But in the seventh century, in the time of Theodore, Archbishop of Canterbury, Parishes were spread all over England, and tithes paid to the Clergy in them.

William. But what has that to do with your Church? Then people were all Roman Catholics, were they not?

James. Not a bit of it. They were all English Churchmen, belonging to the National Church. There never has been but one Church in England from that day to this. The English people never liked the interference of Rome, and never willingly tolerated Papal supremacy in this country.

William. This is all new light to me. I never heard anything about this before.

James. Very likely not; but before you vote against the Church, my good friend, you should know something of her true work and history.

William. But I have read in print all that I have told you.

James. I am sure you have. But what I want you to do is not to believe what the enemies of the Church tell you about her, but to look into the matter for yourself.

William. Well, I am willing to do so.

James. Then you will soon change your mind, and like so many others you will follow no longer the guidance of those who have so long misled you.

William. Tell me then what took place at the Reformation?

James. Briefly this. The Church of England, by the united action of the authorities in Church and State, reformed herself. The new additions Rome had made to the old faith were rejected. The usurped jurisdiction exercised for a time by the Pope in England was abolished. The Bible and the Prayer Book were translated into English. These were the chief things that were done.

William. But you have said nothing about what became of the Churches and Church property.

James. The Cathedrals and the Parish Churches remained in the same hands as before. Of the 9,000 English Clergy before the Reformation all but 150 remained Clergy of the Church after the Reformation. The tithes and lands remained also in the hands of the Church, with the exception of those belonging to the monasteries and chantries, which were conferred by the Crown upon laymen.

William. Then there was no new Church introduced into England at the Reformation after all?

James. Certainly not.

William. But what did the Dissenters do at that time?

James. There were no Dissenting bodies in England then. They have all risen up since.

William. But I thought that the State had picked out the Church from amongst the other religious bodies, and established and endowed it, and that this was the cause of the grievance of which the political Dissenters now complain so bitterly.

James. Then, my friend, you are altogether in the wrong. Dissent arose from certain persons leaving the Church of England and making new religious bodies of their own accord. They went out from the old Church and formed another religion for themselves, with their own ministers and their own form of worship, and so Independents, Baptists, and other like sects first began to exist in England.

William. So this is why Dissenters have no share in the Church property, and have to pay their own ministers and build places of worship for themselves?

James. Exactly so. They left the Church of their own free will, and so gave up their rights in her property and her Churches.

William. That was only fair, when they did not wish to worship any longer in her fold.

James. Just so. But from time to time many of the Dissenters have come back to the Church, and regained their old position, and all could do so if they wished.

William. Many will never do that.

James. I fear not. But the Church is not to blame for that, but themselves only.

William. I understand now why it is the political Dissenters want to disestablish and to disendow the Church. They find the Church has a position they have not, and they want to pull it down to their own level.

James. There, my friend, you have got very near to the truth.

William. But tell me, did not the Church in days gone by greatly persecute the Dissenters who had left her fold?

James. In the days when Dissent first began in England, and for a long time afterwards, religious toleration was a thing unknown. The Church laid a heavy hand on Dissent, and Dissent, when it had the chance, laid a heavy hand upon the Church.

William. But did not the Church in A.D. 1662 eject 2,000 "godly ministers" from their livings and turn them out to starve?

James. Wait, my friend, you are a little too quick with your history. I must ask you to go back for a few years and look into the state of things then. You have heard of King Charles I.?

William. Of course I have

James. Well, during his reign the Dissenters got the upper hand over the Church. When they came into power, they first killed the King, then upset the Bishops, next turned all the Church of England Clergy and their families out of their homes, and put their "godly ministers" into them. So that they had no objection to Establishment and Endowment for themselves.

William. I had forgotten all about this.

James. So do many others when they talk about the "persecution" of 1662. The truth is, that when Charles II. was restored in 1660, Episopacy was brought back, and the starved and exiled English Clergy came home again. But they found the Puritan ministers in possession of their livings, and all who

conformed were allowed to remain, but some 1,400 at most (not 2000 as commonly stated) had to give up the livings they had taken from the old Clergy, and these are the "2000 persecuted ministers" of whom you hear so much.

William. This gives a very different view of the matter from that which I had believed before.

James. But then you have been accustomed to believe history as it is current amongst Dissenters, and have not looked into it for yourself to find out the actual truth.

William. Yes, but I shall always do so in future.

James. An excellent resolution, which will save you from many mistakes.

William. Now you have told me so much, I want to know a little more. You have explained many things which enable me to understand the situation much better than I did before. But still there are several points on which I wish for information. Would not the farmer be much better off if he paid no tithes?

James. In such a case he would be worse, not better off. The farmer does not pay tithes now. When he took the lease of his farm he paid so much less rent because of the tithe. If the latter were abolished, the rent would be raised just so much at once; but you forget into whose pockets the tithe goes now. The Clergy spend it mostly in the district where they live. It goes into the pockets of the tradesmen and labourers of the locality, and sometimes of the farmers themselves. The removal of the tithe would impoverish many in the district and benefit nobody.

William. But are not the Irish people much better off for the Disestablishment of the Irish Church?

James. Not a penny the better. Tithe is still paid in Ireland as before Disestablishment. Not to the Parson indeed, but to the State. It is taken away from the locality and is paid to the Government. So the people lose the benefit of the tithes formerly spent amongst them, and the Church people besides have an additional tax put upon them in order to pay their own Parson, who formerly cost them nothing.

William. This must greatly impoverish a district where the Clergyman was the chief resident gentleman before?

James. Of course it does. The Clergyman spent his private as well as his official income in the locality, and now in many places both are gone. Since Disestablishment the Irish people are more impoverished, more discontented, and more averse to English rule than they were before.

William. This is very different from what we were told when we were asked to vote for Irish Church Disestablishment.

James. Yes. And fine things are now promised to the English people if the Church of England were disestablished ; but, as the evil results here would be far deeper and more wide-spread, so the ruin would be far greater than in Ireland.

William. It would be well for all classes of Englishmen to think about this before it is too late ; but after all are not at least half the people of England Nonconformists at present ?

James. Here you are quite mistaken. English Dissent has done its utmost to prevent the true number of Nonconformists in England being known, and they have gone about boasting of its increase of late years, whereas really it has gone down in numbers all over the country.

William. But would not a religious Census easily find out the truth about this as in Ireland ?

James. Yes. But English Dissenters vehemently oppose the truth being found out about this. Modern Nonconformists call it an interference with their "religious liberty," but the old Nonconformists would never have been ashamed of having the actual fact known. They gloried in being "a little flock," and called the Church "a mixed multitude."

William. But are there no means of finding out now something about the religious opinions of the people ?

James. An official religious Census is the only thoroughly trustworthy means of doing so. But official returns exist from which a pretty accurate estimate can be formed.

William. Tell me what they are.

James. Taking the latest official information, out of every 100 of the population, the

School returns show	-	-	72	Churchmen.
Marriage	-	-	75	"
Navy	-	-	75	"
Army	-	-	63	"
Cemeteries (Buried in)	-	-	70	"
Workhouses	-	-	79	"

So that the result of a real religious Census would probably show that three-fourths of the people are Churchmen and one-fourth are Nonconformists.

William. But how do Nonconformists get over these actual facts ?

James. They have made a Census after a strange fashion of their own. They build chapel after chapel not required by the population ; they register public halls, rooms, barns, and even "Railway Arches," used for their services as "Dis-senting places of worship," and then, reckoning up all the seats

in them, say Nonconformists have provided “so many sittings” for public worship, which proves they have “so many members.”

William. This is an easy way of increasing a denomination—but but there will be a heavy day of reckoning for them when the actual number becomes known.

James. Just so. And that is why they fight so vehemently against a real religious Census.

William. But after all do not Nonconformists set a worthy example to the Church, by voluntarily paying for their own ministers and their services, whilst your Clergy are paid by endowments, so that you have to pay nothing?

James. There again you are greatly mistaken. Churchmen give vast sums yearly for the support of the Church. For the last forty years they have given 1,000,000*l.* every year for Church building and Church restoration. In 1877 they gave 620,034*l.* for voluntary schools, whilst the same year all the Dissenters only subscribed 104,930*l.* for this purpose. So that probably in addition to her endowments the Church raises yearly by voluntary subscriptions as much as all the Dissenters give for the support of their religious worship.

William. Then the Church has a great voluntary system of her own.

James. Without doubt she has. And remember she offers the ministrations of the Gospel to all the English poor without money and without price. Whereas Nonconformity, with rare exceptions, only ministers to those who can afford to pay for their seats.

William. Why do so many Churchmen object to Dissenting ministers burying the dead with their own services in the Parish Churchyard?

James. For two reasons. First, because they openly tell us they want to get into our Churchyards, in order to get afterwards into our Churches; next, because the Churchyards have been consecrated and solemnly set apart for Church services, and to bring alien services into them would greatly offend the consciences of many Churchmen; and, lastly, because the law has provided means by which Dissenting ministers can bury their dead with their own services in every locality, if they wish to do so.

William. But did not Nonconformists, some years ago, say their consciences forbade their burying in your Churchyards or using your Churches, and that therefore it was very unjust to make them pay Church rates?

James. Yes; and they agitated till by the aid of Irishmen and Scotchmen in Parliament they got Church rates abolished.

And now, when the whole expense of maintaining the Churchyards falls upon Churchmen, they want to force their services into our Churchyards against the wish of the vast majority of Churchmen, and all the while they call themselves the advocates of religious liberty.

William. But are Protestant Nonconformists willing to ally themselves with Irish Roman Catholics to pull down the old National Church?

James. Certainly. They have no hope of destroying the Establishment without it. They will have to make a bargain with the Irish Home Rulers to join them in pulling down and robbing the National Church, and a heavy price the Irishmen will demand for their share in the work.

William. I don't think Englishmen will ever stand this. I am, as you know, a Nonconformist myself, but I should both work and vote against the destruction of the Establishment by Irish Roman Catholic votes.

James. And I believe many other honest and straightforward Nonconformists, when they understand what this agitation for Disestablishment will end in, will do the same thing.

William. Anyhow, I have heard enough to prevent my voting for any Disestablishment candidate this election; and I shall go now and talk the matter over with some of my friends, and tell them a bit of my mind.

James. There will be many more who will come to that way of thinking if you tell them all the talk we have had together.



